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## Genesis 1 as Vision: What Are the Implications?

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Conservative scholars do not agree on the source from which Moses received the information found in Genesis 1:1–2:3.<sup>1</sup> Many believe the creation narrative was part of an ancient oral tradition. Some believe it was passed down in writing.<sup>2</sup> Other scholars believe the story was revealed to Moses in some way. The Bible, of course, while telling us the narrative is inspired and so a trustworthy source of teaching (1 Tim 3:16), does not tell us how it was received. If it was in fact revealed, however, then it may have been revealed in words, but also it may have been revealed in a vision. If it was revealed in a vision, then there are aspects of other visions that may help us reconstruct what Moses might have seen. Such a reconstruction, though necessarily speculative, sheds light on certain exegetical questions.

In Numbers 12:8 God tells Aaron and Miriam He talks with Moses “face to face.” In the vision of Daniel 11–12 the information given the prophet is highly symbolic, but entirely oral. Daniel sees the angel who speaks to him, but he does not see the future—he hears it. That doesn’t necessarily mean, of course, that

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<sup>1</sup> I am assuming the veracity of the ancient tradition that calls the first five books of the Bible “The Books of Moses.” In Mark 12:26 Jesus refers to “the book of Moses,” though He is alluding to a story in Exodus (see also 2 Chron 25:4; 35:12; Ezra 6:18; Neh 13:1).

<sup>2</sup> See R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), 547–553, who suggests that Moses may have had access to Genesis stories preserved on clay tablets. In an upcoming book William H. Shea speculates that the stories were inscribed in an early version of the alphabetic Proto-Sinaitic long before the time of Moses. Certainly Moses could have known and used this script, and the fact that W. F. Albright dated the earliest accepted inscriptions to the 15<sup>th</sup> century B.C. does not mean it was never written before that. Indeed, it seems unlikely that this elegant alphabet was created at that time by slaves in a Sinai turquoise mine. However, in this paper I will consider another possibility.

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God dictated the creation story to Moses or that He only communicated in words. In Genesis 15 God reveals Himself to Abraham both in words and in visual symbols. The vision of Daniel 2 is entirely silent, while the vision in the first half of Daniel 7 is apparently silent except for the boasting of the little horn. In Revelation, everything imparted to John in chapter 12 is seen and apparently not heard at all, except for vs. 10–12, which are specifically heard as a commentary on what John is seeing.<sup>3</sup> Genesis 1 seems to be primarily visual, except for the voice of God.

I would suggest that the vision of Revelation 12 might be conceived as a brief, simple animated film with only a few scenes (a shot of the woman, a shot of the dragon, a shot of the woman in labor with the dragon waiting at her feet, a shot of the child being lifted up to heaven, etc.). I don't think John necessarily saw a real woman or dragon. The vision of Genesis 1, on the other hand, if it is in fact based on a vision, is most helpfully seen as cinematography, rather than animation, with Moses seeing real things, but with the time scale shortened from days to minutes by editing. The vision might have used such standard cinematic techniques as establishing shots, long shots, medium shots, close-ups, cuts, fades to black, sound effects, voice-overs, and time-lapse photography. We would be mistaken to think Moses saw the creation in real time, a vision actually a week long, like some Andy Warhol experimental movie. Rather, the entire vision may have taken at most an hour. Among visions, Genesis 1 is also unusual in looking at the past, rather than the immediate or distant future. (Similar examples might include Gen 2–3, less possibly the flood narrative, and perhaps aspects of Isa 14 and Ezek 28.)

A feature of most prophecy is symbolism and a heightened, often poetic use of such figures of speech as metaphor, synecdoche, and hyperbole to reveal a literal truth. To see, say, the various beasts of Daniel and Revelation as literal rather than symbolic would lead to serious misinterpretation. Many scholars have suggested symbolic or poetic meanings in Gen 1 lending themselves to a mythic interpretation of the narrative, but while there is some poetic language in Gen 1, it is no more poetry than Charles Dickens' poetic prose or the measured tread of the Declaration of Independence are poetry.<sup>4</sup> A cinematic reading of the

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<sup>3</sup> See William H. Shea & Ed Christian, "The Chiastic Structure of Rev 12:1–15:4: The Great Controversy Vision," *AUSS* 38:2 (Autumn 2000), where I write, "Except for Rev 12:10–12, introduced by the words 'And I heard,' the entire Dragons' War Chiasm seems to be silent . . . It should be imagined as a series of brief animations, rather than as an extended vision of actual events. John is describing what he is shown, rather than summarizing the war. The summarizing has already been done for him, so he knows what is important and must be included. Vv. 10–12 could be seen as a vocal commentary on the events seen in vv. 9–10, a sort of 'voice over,' to use the cinematic term."

<sup>4</sup> As John Sailhamer writes in *Genesis Unbound* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah, 1996), "[T]he author clearly intends us to read his account of creation as literal history. He does not expect to be understood as writing mythology or poetry. His account, as he understands it, is a historical account of creation" (45). "Although many have interpreted the creation account as if it were poetic, there are no signs that these texts were intended to be read as such. To be sure, the texts are written in a

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story also seems to downplay the mythic even as it reveals the scenic editing of the vision.<sup>5</sup>

#### **In the Beginning**

We turn now to the text. On day one God is said to have commanded the appearance of light. The text does not say that on that day God created the seas or the earth or the universe. When were they created? “In the beginning,” whenever that might have been. They did not merely happen. They were created, by God, at some time before the creation week described in the rest of Gen. 1. Genesis 1:1 reveals an ancient creation of the universe, including the sun and the wet rock we call earth, “in the beginning,” *b<sup>e</sup>re’sît*, an indeterminate time before God created life here.<sup>6</sup> The phrase, however, is a statement by Moses, not by *\*lōhîm*. There is no scenic content to the verse, no description of this creation of the heavens. That is to say, Moses does not seem to have seen the universe being created. He simply states that it was created. It was there, heavens and earth, *haššāmayim w<sup>e</sup>’et hā’āreš*, when the vision began with water and darkness.<sup>7</sup>

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structured, balanced, narrative style, and repetition is frequently used. But in themselves, such features do not indicate the presence of poetry” (227; see also 227–230). This book is full of insight into the word usage in Genesis 1, though I do not accept Sailhamer’s belief that there was life on earth before creation week.

<sup>5</sup> Sailhamer writes, again, “The use of ‘myth’ to explain the biblical creation narratives, however, has run into serious trouble. For one thing, the biblical texts do not look like myths. Ancient myths were, as far as we know, always poetic. Poetry was a defining characteristic of ancient mythology. . . . Judging from what we know about ancient creation myths, the biblical texts give every impression of having been written and understood as realistic depictions of actual events” (*Genesis Unbound*, 230). “Most biblical scholars agree that there is little basis for assuming the biblical writer used or had access to any known ancient Near Eastern creation myth” [80; in a note he cites John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), 34–38; see also n. 25 of this paper]. Some might argue that this cinematic approach could be used to argue that there might be millions of years between each scene called a “day.” It is true that it is Moses who perceives that literal days are passing. God Himself does not say so in the vision, but He does choose this order and the darkness/light pattern recognized as “days.” As we will see, the vision makes most sense when seen as a series of closely related events following in a logical sequence. If the vision is meant to reveal aeons symbolized as days, why devote one day to light or the “lights”? Did they take millions of years to develop?

<sup>6</sup> Sailhamer writes that *re’sît* is the usual Hebrew word for a “beginning” of unspecified duration, as in the beginning of a king’s reign. If Moses had meant to indicate that this marked the “start” or “initial point” of the universe or this planet or solar system, he could have used the words *rišōniy* or *’ēhillāh* (*Genesis Unbound*, 40–41).

<sup>7</sup> I agree with Sailhamer that the focus of Genesis 1 is “the land,” pointing toward “the promised land,” not “the earth” as globe or even as all dry land on the globe. He explains that the phrase “the heavens and the earth” in v. 1, however, is a merism, an idiomatic expression in which polar opposites, combined, stand for an entirety. There was no Hebrew word for “universe,” and the conception of the universe Moses would have had would have been much different from our own. “The heavens and the earth,” however, was the expression used to refer to the totality of what God had made before creation week (*Genesis Unbound*, 55–57). The phrase “the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that in them is” is not a merism, however, but a list of what God made during creation

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This creation does not seem to have been, thus, part of the movie, part of the vision. Some have seen the verse as a title or summary, but Sailhamer has shown conclusively that it is not.<sup>8</sup> It seems, rather, to be Moses' inspired deduction, based on v. 2, of an ancient universal creation.<sup>9</sup> He saw that it existed, therefore God must have made it.<sup>10</sup> This is not only a deduction, of course, but a statement of faith, to be accepted by faith.

It may be, of course, that God gave Moses a very quick view of that creation. Perhaps the movie began with an establishing shot, from space. Perhaps God revealed to Moses in a few minutes, using a sort of time-lapse technique, a universal creation that took aeons as God shepherded stardust, rolled it into balls, and set it afire. Then perhaps God revealed this world, swathed in dense clouds, black beneath yet glowing from above (Job 38:8–9). It may be that Moses was so unbalanced by these sights seen from such an unaccustomed point of view that rather than describe them, he simply wrote, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Better perhaps to leave it at that. Who would believe him?

What if the movie begins in v. 2, however? Moses tells us the earth (or, better, "the land"), as it appeared before God began this work of creation week, was unformed and unfilled—*tōhū wābōhū*—covered with water, and dark.<sup>11</sup> If

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week. "Exodus 20:11 does not say God *created* 'the heavens and earth' in six days; it says God *made* three things in six days—the sky, the land, and the seas—and then filled them during that same period" (106).

<sup>8</sup> "1. In the original the first verse is a complete sentence that makes a statement, but titles are not formed that way in Hebrew. . . . 2. The conjunction 'and' at the beginning of the second verse makes it highly unlikely that 1:1 is a title. . . . 3. Genesis 1 has a summary title at its conclusion [2:4], making it unlikely it would have another at its beginning" (*Genesis Unbound*, 102–103).

<sup>9</sup> I am not suggesting a prior creation of life on earth, as speculated by Sailhamer in *Genesis Unbound* and by John B. Wong in *The Resurrected Body—Y2K and Beyond* (Lanham, MD: University P of America, 2000), 319–321.

<sup>10</sup> Gregory A. Boyd writes, in *God At War: The Bible & Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), "[I]t is significant that the author does not say that God created the darkness, the deep or the waters. This does not necessarily imply that the author thought of these as eternal realities, only that it did not suit his purposes in composing this account to state this at this point (320, n. 34).

<sup>11</sup> I owe the "unformed and unfilled" translation to Richard Davidson (private conversation). There is a long tradition of seeing *tōhū wābōhū* as a description of chaos. This fits in neatly with the ANE picture of Tiamat the chaos monster or goddess being destroyed or conquered. It also fits in with the Greek world view already seen in the LXX translation. However, in his commentary on Genesis for *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), Sailhamer quotes Isaiah 45:18 as evidence of the meaning of *tōhū*. "[God] did not create it [the land] to be empty [*tōhū*], but formed it to be inhabited" (2:24). This suggests that bringing forth what was inhabitable from what had been empty was closely allied to goodness in God's eyes. Similarly, being fruitful, multiplying, filling the now inhabitable earth was good. I believe Moses was saying *the land* (with all the connotations the word would have had to his first listeners) was *tōhū wābōhū*. It was unformed not because it was chaotic, but because it was still under water, and so without the form it would soon have. It was unfilled because it was not yet habitable.

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this were revealed to him in a vision, what would he have seen? He would have seen nothing! If he first saw the earth from the outside, in what is called an establishing shot, perhaps he was carried down into the darkness, as if in a space capsule, down and down until he splashed into warm water. What would the movie look like then? A black screen with the muted sound of the sea in a fog far from land!<sup>12</sup> Would Moses, in vision, have felt himself to be *in* the water? Perhaps. Perhaps this scene gave Moses the feeling of flailing amid dark waves, not knowing where he was or what was going on. After all, he didn't buy a ticket to this movie, and it doesn't seem to have come with a title or credits or subtitles, unless we see Gen. 2:4 as the title.

Perhaps instead he felt himself to be again in a little ark like the one he rode on the Nile in his infancy, a sort of coracle, basket-like and bobbing like a cork. He heard waves splashing the sides, trailed his hands in the water. He couldn't see the water, but he knew it was there. What's more, it was the only time in his life he'd been unable to see land.

Apparently God didn't tell Moses in the vision that water covered the face of the earth. Moses does not report that God said that. Moses does not seem to have searched the world for signs of land. How did he know there was water everywhere? On the third day in the vision God commanded the dry land to appear, so perhaps Moses as writer deduced that in the time of darkness and water all land was submarine. However, if Sailhamer is correct in reading *hā'āreṣ* as "the land," and I think he is, then Moses was not in any case describing the face of the entire earth, but only stating that "the face of the land" he would see on the third day was still underwater. He was not making a deduction regarding the entire earth on the basis of what he could see in his vision, but merely explaining that he couldn't yet see the land he saw a few minutes later, in the representation of the third day.<sup>13</sup>

How did Moses know God's Spirit was hovering over the water? Did it glow in the darkness like some bioluminescent jellyfish? Did Moses sense the Spirit's presence? God seems not to have told him, for he does not report hearing God speak at this time. Was this Spirit the equivalent of the voice of God Moses was about to hear without any physical manifestation? Did Moses,

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. Job 38:8–9, "Or who shut up the sea with doors, when it brake forth, as if it had issued out of the womb? When I made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness a swaddlingband for it." Job 38 is of course poetry and uses extravagant imagery, not to be taken literally, but we find still the suggestion that the darkness was due to dense cloud cover, not to their being no light in the universe.

<sup>13</sup> Even given his education as a prince of Egypt, for Moses the land given to Abraham would have taken up most of his conception of the world. It included everything north of Egypt (or perhaps north of the Nile—though literally the Nile is south east, not due south), south of Assyria (on the Tigris) and Babylon (on the Euphrates), east of the Great Sea, and west of Ur (on the Euphrates). Beyond those "border" countries were barely known barbarian lands. "The land" was the heart, the center, the region between the seas and between the great powers of his time, though it also included much of the land claimed by those powers.

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working back from the voice he heard next, speculate that God's Spirit must have been hovering over the water, because he heard a voice but saw no one? Perhaps.<sup>14</sup> As the Hebrew word for Spirit, *ru<sup>a</sup>h*, also means "breath," it may be that Moses saw the dense, dark vapor covering the water in poetic terms as the breath of God.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Forming the Creation**

In that liquid darkness Moses heard a voice he recognized, the voice of God.<sup>16</sup> It spoke the first words heard in this vision, "Let there be light." Moses reports the result: "and there was light." Did it come on like a lightbulb? Probably not. If we see this vision as a movie, then we needn't imagine the first day in the vision as taking more than a few minutes. In the vision, after the voice spoke, there seemed at first to be no response. Then slowly, almost imperceptibly, as the seconds passed, like the creeping of the earliest dawn, Moses realized that he could just barely make out his hand in front of his face. The light increased until he seemed to be in a cloud. But all he could see was cloud, water, and his hands. Perhaps he heard the disembodied voice of God say "Day." Then it said, "*Tob*," "Good." Then gradually the light faded, and the voice said, "Night." As best we can judge from his report, that is all Moses heard and saw. The scene faded to black. As he later wrote out what he'd seen, he wrote, "It was evening and morning: one day."<sup>17</sup> Moses did not necessarily mean evening

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<sup>14</sup> Boyd writes (85), "Hence the 'deep' that in *Enuma Elish* was represented as the evil Tiamat is here simply water. Far from battling it, Yahweh's 'Spirit' (or 'breath' or 'wind') simply 'sweeps' or 'hovers' over it (1:2). So too, the stars, moon and sun, which Babylonian and Canaanite literature viewed as enslaved rebel gods, are here simply things that Yahweh has created (1:14-19)."

<sup>15</sup> It is interesting to look at how "the deep," *t'hôm*, is used in Ezek 31, which presents an extended metaphor of Assyria as a "cedar in Lebanon" and makes frequent reference to "Sheol" and "the pit." (We might recall that Ezek 28, ostensibly dealing with the King of Tyre—also in Lebanon—has often been thought to contain a coded description of the fall of Satan.) Genesis 1:2 refers to "waters" and "the deep." Ezekiel 31: 4 reads, "The waters make him great, the deep set him up on high . . ." Verse 15 reads, "Thus saith the Lord GOD: In the day when he went down to the grave I caused a mourning: I covered the deep for him, and I restrained the floods thereof, and the great waters were stayed." The LXX, of course, translates *t'hôm* as *abussos*, the same word used in Rev 20 to represent the place where Satan will be chained during the millennium. Is it possible that the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters, over the deep, in order to hold back Satan, restrain him in the abyss, while God created Eden and placed a garden in it? Was God, through the creation of the land and the garden and the man made in His image, establishing an earthly beachhead in the cosmic conflict from which Adam, as His champion, could do single-handed battle against the dragon and his angels, cast from heaven, with the earth and all mankind at stake?

<sup>16</sup> There is of course no textual reason to assume Moses wrote Genesis before the Exodus, though he certainly would have known the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or God wouldn't have identified Himself as their God in Exod 3:6.

<sup>17</sup> Translation by John H. Sailhamer in *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 89. E. A. Speiser writes, in his Anchor Bible commentary *Genesis* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1964), "In Semitic (notably, in Akkadian, cf. Gilg., Tablet XI, lines 215 ff.) the normal ordinal series is 'one, second, third,' etc., not 'first, second, third,' etc." (6; emphasis in original). In

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came before morning, though the Israelites later understood it that way. More likely, he was defining day as a complete cycle of light and darkness, without meaning to imply which came first. If the evening came first on the first day, then God's command "Let there be light" might have been followed by twelve hours of darkness!<sup>18</sup>

From our cinematic experience we know that in a scene in a movie, a few lines of dialogue may represent a long conversation. Likewise, in a vision a few representative words may serve more as symbols than as actual words used. If Moses saw in vision a severely shortened version of the real-time creation week, carefully edited so the words used would be few in number and easily memorable, then we should understand that during that week God may well have done a lot more talking than is reported. For all we know the angels of heaven may have gathered around to comment on and praise each creative act. But that is not in the movie, so if it happened that way, we don't know. What does seem clear is that the editing emphasized that Moses was not meant to see the creation as happening over aeons, but in twenty-four hour days.<sup>19</sup>

Some have argued that the sun was created on the fourth day, so the light Moses saw on the first day must have been the light of God. If this were so, however, then does the light of God's presence go out at night? Also, if this were so, then actually the fourth day was the first day, as day is defined as evening and morning, which are dependent on the sun and the rotation of the earth. If we see Moses' vision in cinematic terms, with him merely describing what he sees from his viewpoint, then we can deduce that God's command for light to appear was fulfilled by God's gradually raising the dark, dense clouds that covered the earth's waters. On the second day this would leave a gap between ocean and clouds which Moses could see, but on the first day the only visible result was a diffuse light which came from the sun, even though that sun would not be visible for several days.<sup>20</sup>

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the Old Testament, when such numbers are applied to days, they always point to literal, twenty-four hour days, not to prophetic days or symbolic days.

<sup>18</sup> Then again, Moses may have seen the blackness before God's first words as night, thus establishing a night/day pattern. In that case, perhaps God gave most of His commands in the darkness, and His words were obeyed before each day's dawn. In that case, Moses would have seen not the creating but what had just been created, works at least begun, even if not yet complete.

<sup>19</sup> Sailhamer, *Expositor's* (26): "The division between 'the day' and 'the night' in v. 4 also leaves little room for an interpretation of the 'light' in v. 3 as other than that of the light from the sun." It is true that in a movie a fade to black needn't indicate the passage of a day, but from the fourth day on, Moses would have been able to observe the passage of sun and moon through the sky, which strongly supports the twenty-four hour day scenario.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.: "It should be noted, however, that the sun, moon, and stars are all to be included in the usual meaning of the phrase 'heavens and the earth' (*haššamayim w'et hā'āreš*), and thus according to the present account these celestial bodies were all created in v. 1. Verse 3 then does not describe the creation of the sun but the appearance of the sun through the darkness, . . ."

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In Moses' vision the darkness lifted at the dawn of the second day, and again he saw the water close around him and the fog. Again he heard God's voice: "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." In fast motion, as Moses watched, the fog rose in a few minutes higher and higher. As it was revealed he heard God say "*šāmayim*," "sky" or "heavens." Now, as far as Moses could see around him, he saw nothing but water. Above him was an expanding bowl of unbroken cloud, growing steadily brighter, and within that an expanse of clear sky. (The Hebrew word used, *rāqīʿ*, suggests an inverted bowl of hammered metal.) The sky and cloud darkened, and again the scene faded to black. The second day was past.

In Moses' day the earth was seen as flat. God, not wanting to reveal what was beyond the imagination of Moses and those around him and so foster skepticism, showed him nothing that might disabuse him of this notion. On the other hand, nothing in the vision necessarily reinforced the idea of a flat earth. When God reveals truth to His servants the prophets, He needn't reveal to them the entire truth. Truth is sometimes progressive, revealed as we are ready to receive it.

In Moses' vision, the darkness faded, and again he saw water, sky, and high overcast. Again he heard God's voice: "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear." (The Hebrew word for "dry land" here, *yabbāšâ*, is not the usual word for "land" in the chapter, *hā'āreš*, but is a word sometimes used when what has been underwater—under, say, a river or sea—is made relatively dry.)<sup>21</sup> This verse deserves a careful reading. God did not say, "Let there be oceans and let there be dry continents." We've merely assumed that on the basis of our own geographical knowledge. Clearly oceans were already present in v. 2. He did not say, "Let dry land rise up out of the oceans and form mountains." He commanded that the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place. While in fact the land must have been rising above the water level, according to the text it appeared because the waters were "gathered together unto one place," thus exposing the land.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For example, the drying of the earth after the flood (Gen 8:7, 14), the Red Sea during the Exodus (Josh 2:10, Nah 1:4), and the Jordan during the Exodus (Josh 4:23; 5:1). See R. K. Harrison, *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis* (Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1997), 2:393–394.

<sup>22</sup> Boyd says that the biblical conception was that the foundations of the earth rested atop the waters below the earth (84), but the texts he cites to support this are not convincing. In Ps 104:5–6, we read, "Who laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed for ever. Thou coveredst it with the deep as with a garment: the waters stood above the mountains." This is, again, highly metaphorical poetry, but the suggestion is that earth was the foundations, with "the land" covered with a relatively thin "garment" of water. Waters "under the earth" may refer to underground aquifers and springs, but then again it may refer merely to the simple observation that the oceans and seas always seem to be below the level of the land adjacent to them. (Moses probably had no conception of a lake, such as Lake Titicaca in Peru, nestled among mountain peaks far above sea level.)



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We should not imagine that God is referring here to the oceans, or even to the Mediterranean Sea. A more literal translation of the Hebrew might be “let the waters be pooled into one pool.” The Hebrew word *miqweh* means a pool or reservoir.<sup>23</sup> It is also the word for the ceremonial bath used for cleansing or baptism. As Moses watched, what happened literally in hours, he saw in minutes. As the land rose, the water on it flowed toward one central pool. Given the words used, Moses probably saw the entire circumference of a large lake surrounded by dry land. Muddy, sandy land rose up from the sea like a whale rising to the surface, while the water that had been covering the land all seemed to flow toward this lake. The text suggests that he did not see it rise very high. Nothing in the text leads us to think he saw the formation of mountains.<sup>24</sup>

Perhaps Moses heard God say, “It shall be called land” and “It shall be called seas.” Or perhaps he heard the words “land,” *hā’āreš*, and “seas,” *yām*, and as in this vision God spoke in a language Moses understood, Moses knew at once what God was talking about. God didn’t have to say, “This wet stuff is the sea.” The Hebrew word *hā’āreš* is the same word used in referring to “the land the Lord thy God” gave to the Israelites. The vision does not tell us Moses saw all the lands of the earth. He saw “the land.” Sailhamer argues that Moses would have identified this land with the land promised to Abraham.<sup>25</sup> The word *yām* is the same word used in referring to the “Sea of Kinnereth,” or Galilee, in Num 34:11; to the “Salt Sea” or Dead Sea in Num 34:12; and to the bronze “Sea” or laver outside Solomon’s temple in 1 Kgs 7:23.

This does not mean, of course, that there were no oceans on the planet. Moses saw dry land completely enclosing a sea or lake. What he saw and what he described was limited by what his vision revealed.<sup>26</sup> If Genesis 1 is in fact

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<sup>23</sup> See Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., *NIDOTTE*, 3:896–897.

<sup>24</sup> In their article “A Scientific Paradigm for the Genesis Flood” [*JATS*, 12/1 (Spring 2001): 107], Ted and Ken Noel suggest it is unlikely that any mountain before the flood, especially in the area of “the land” of Eden, was 2,000 feet or more high, as this would have caused weather patterns leading to rain, contradicting Gen 2:5. Also, they explain, such an elevation could well lead to uncomfortably cool nights, and it would affect the dew point. Their arguments are too complex to be explained here, but worth reading.

<sup>25</sup> *Genesis Unbound*, 50–54.

<sup>26</sup> And what his vision revealed was limited by his viewpoint, the height from which he saw this event. What might he have seen? We can estimate. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (on-line article on “Horizon”), if Moses’ point of view was five feet above flat land, his horizon would have been only 2.8 miles, which means the “sea” would have been a mere pond. If he saw the scene from a low hill, he would have seen a bit farther. If he found himself on a peak 2,000 feet above an otherwise flat land, he would have been able to see only about 25 miles, due to the earth’s curvature. Even if he saw the scene from 10,000 feet in the air, however, about the height of Mt. Hermon in Israel, he could have seen only 126 miles, at most. This may help us imagine what he might have seen and what he would have been unable to see. Of course, at that elevation, he would not have seen the details of the creation of vegetation and animals, and it is very unlikely that God made mountains of that height on that day. (The usefulness of cinematic techniques such as using zoom or telephoto lenses in vision is again evident.) It seems more likely that at most, if he were on

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based on a vision, then the “sea” and the “land” may have symbolized all seas and lands. But there is a more important meaning to what he was shown.

When God commanded that light appear, He pronounced it “good” because it was good for the plants and animals and people He was about to create. The “waters” Moses also called *t’hôm*, the deep, and because they were uninhabitable and dangerous, they were not “good.” Even on the second day, when God separated the waters above from the waters below, those waters below were still uninhabitable, so He did not call them good. Only on the second day among the first six was nothing called good. After God “gathered” the waters into one place on the third day and named them “seas,” however, they became a safe place for created life, inhabitable, so He called them good. They had been defined, circumscribed, pacified. Perhaps Moses saw them as being relatively shallow and free of waves.<sup>27</sup>

This goodness formula is repeated several more times. How did Moses know, from his vision, that God saw that these things were good? Was he given a sort of spiritual entrance into the mind of God and simply knew God’s thoughts? More likely, he discovered God’s thoughts when God said, “It is good,” even though in the text God is not reported to have spoken these words, or perhaps he deduced God’s satisfaction with His creation from the fact that God proceeded to the next day’s work.

Now, the land having appeared before the eyes of Moses, God spoke again: “Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed is in itself.” In Moses’ vision, did he then see these things suddenly appear, full grown, or did he see the growing as vegetation hastened to obey? Imagine this wonderful scene as the ultimate example of time-lapse photography. You’ve seen such photography, in which cinematographers, by shooting one frame a minute over several weeks, show a plant growing to maturity in seconds. Imagine the land before Moses’ eyes sprouting in a similar fashion, first grasses and flowers, then saplings forced into years of cell development in a matter of hours, though within the vision it was merely minutes, then fruit appearing and ripening in seconds. It would have been a green paradise such as Moses, the dweller in Egypt and Midian, had never even imagined. The slight rising of the land coinciding with the gathering of the waters into one place Moses would have probably seen in a cinematic long shot. As the grasses

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a hill in his vision, Moses might have seen perhaps ten or twenty miles in any direction. We might fairly imagine him seeing a sea the size of the Sea of Galilee.

<sup>27</sup> The ancient evidence, throughout Bible times, is virtually unanimous that deep oceans were considered terrifying and dangerous, not good. There is no mention of rivers in Gen 1 and no mention of this sea in Gen 2. Perhaps we should see this “gathered” sea as being fed by a mammoth spring of fresh water, such as one finds flowing from the end of a major aquifer in northern Florida into a lake, and that it is from this sea or lake that the four rivers flow, rather as the Nile flows from a lake. The word for river used in Gen 2:10, *nāhār*, is used in Job 28:11 for an underground source of a river.

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and trees appeared, perhaps the vision zoomed in on various wonders, backed up as trees grew, dollied through the new-sprung meadows. Some scholars have suggested that if the text is taken literally, Moses saw only plants yielding food edible by humans.<sup>28</sup> Consider the difference to Moses in the desert between seeing a forest of oaks and firs on this day and seeing a forest of fruit and nut trees ripe for the plucking. It would be natural for him to associate it with the “land flowing with milk and honey.” The light faded to black, and Moses knew the third day’s evening had begun.

#### **Filling the Creation**

In his vision, the darkness yielded to light. Moses found himself again on the newly green land surrounding the newly formed sea, though if it seemed to him that he walked there, he doesn’t say so. A bowl of light—bright gray clouds—enclosed the clear air. Perhaps there were mists covering the land. Again he heard God speak: “Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years: and let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.”

A minute later, perhaps, in his vision, Moses saw in the brightness of the clouds something even brighter, though white and nebulous. Perhaps the clouds were burned away, revealing blue sky, but the text does not mention blue sky. It may be that what was seen was not a yellow sun in a blue sky but a glow of light from the “greater and the lesser lights” through the overcast, day and night. The Noels argue that even these lights were not seen at this time because of the cloud cover,<sup>29</sup> but while Moses does not specifically say he saw the “two great lights,” he does confirm that God made them, suggesting that God’s word was obeyed. If he did not see them in the vision, it seems odd that God would do a lot to them a day of Creation. If this were a vision, God commanded that the lights appear, and they appeared. The “waters above the earth” had reached their full height, thus expanding and thinning and allowing more light to pass through. As God began lifting them on the first day light appeared. As He continued lifting them on the second day sky appeared between the clouds and the waters. On the third day the lifting continued, unmentioned, even as land and vegetation appeared. Now, on the fourth day in this vision, the “waters above the earth” were high

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<sup>28</sup> The word translated “grass” in the KJV, *deše*, usually is specific for “new fresh grass.” Mark D. Futato points out that Cassuto and Budde claim that in Gen 1:11, the word refers to “all vegetation, which is then subdivided into plants and trees” (NIDOTTE, 1:999–1000). Sailhamer accepts this, adding that the vegetation is only fruit and nut trees and plants yielding seed good for food. “The selectivity of the Creation account can be seen in the fact that it focuses only on the ‘seed-bearing plants’ and ‘fruit trees.’ Those are the plants that are for man’s food. No other forms of vegetation are mentioned” (*Genesis*, 31–33; see also *Genesis Unbound*, 126–127). Another possibility not requiring an unusual translation of *deše* is that Moses saw green grasses carpeting the land and providing food for the animals and plants and trees yielding food for mankind.

<sup>29</sup> See 114–116.

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enough and diffuse enough for the glorious sun to be seen, at least in part.<sup>30</sup> God says “Let there be lights,” but He does not specifically mention sun, moon, or stars. Moses himself explains, “He *also* made the stars” (emphasis added). This may suggest that Moses did not see the stars in his vision, yet feels himself able to confirm, on the basis of God’s command, that God made them, as well.

In the vision the sun quickly crossed the sky, the sky’s silver light faded to dusk, then glowed more dimly as the “lesser light” appeared in the sky. Now, perhaps, the vision would not fade to black at the close of every day, but the revolutions of the days would be apparent. Verses 16–19 are simply Moses’ prophetic and poetic comments on why God made these “great lights.” God commanded “Let there be lights,” and the lights appeared.<sup>31</sup> This need not mean they were created at that instant. It was Moses, commenting, who affirmed that the lights were made by God.<sup>32</sup> If this is understood as an affirmation of God as maker or creator of these lights—which in the land of Moses’ birth were themselves worshiped as gods—then the text no longer seems to be saying that God created them at that moment, but only that He made them. When? Verse 1 tells us: “In the beginning.”

Our experience with time-lapse photography prepares us for the appearance of vegetation on the third day, but what of the fifth day? In his vision, again Moses heard the voice of God: “Let the waters bring forth abundantly the mov-

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<sup>30</sup> A gloss on the text in the New Scofield Reference Bible reads, “The sun and moon were created ‘in the beginning.’ The ‘light’ of course came from the sun, but the vapor diffused the light. Later the sun appeared in an unclouded sky.”

<sup>31</sup> We should bear in mind that according to this reading of the text, God was showing Moses in vision what He wanted Moses to report about the creation, not necessarily showing him a replay of exactly what happened. What we know of how prophetic visions work suggests that there may be a difference between God using the specific words “Let there be lights” on the actual day God did these things and God saying “Let there be lights” in the vision so Moses would understand that on this day the lights appeared at the command of God. We sometimes forget that there is a difference between a vision and a television newscast of actual events. By giving Moses this vision, God revealed the truth behind the ancient Near Eastern myths, revealing Himself as the Creator, but He did it in such a way that Moses would have been able to see the slight similarities the myths bore to the truth and understand that God was providing a corrective to a mis-remembered and mythologized picture. This does not mean, however, that God necessarily presented the entire story of everything He said and did during the creation week.

<sup>32</sup> The word *‘āśāh*, used 2,627 times in the OT, and translated here as “made,” has a wide range of meaning and does not necessarily mean creation *ex nihilo*. Sailhamer writes, “When the text says that on the second day God ‘made’ the sky and the land, it means the same as the English expression ‘to make’ a bed. Elsewhere in the Bible the same Hebrew word is used to describe cutting one’s fingernails (Deuteronomy 21:12), washing one’s feet (2 Samuel 19:25), and trimming one’s beard (2 Samuel 19:24). The same word also means ‘to appoint’ and ‘to acquire.’ The word means to put something in good order, to make it right. When the land was covered with water, it was not yet right (or fit) for human beings. God commanded the waters to recede from the land so that it would be a dry place for human habitation. It was in that sense that God ‘made’ the land and the sky on the second day” (*Genesis Unbound*, 107–108). Likewise, he sees the “lights” on the fourth day as having been “‘set in order’” “so as to be beneficial for humanity” (*ibid.*, 131).

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ing creature that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.” What did he see? The sea creatures could appear below the surface of the seas God had gathered, out of sight, so Moses needn’t see anything until they leaped above the waves or he looked into the water. But what of the flying things? At God’s command, did they suddenly appear in mid-air, in mid-beat of their wings? Did they appear on branches with a pop or an arpeggio played on a harp, then take to the sky with a great flapping of wings? Did they have to learn to fly? Did they appear as chicks and shoot out feathers and grow in size rather like the grass and trees may have matured? Did they all appear at once, or did God work on one at a time?

In Gen 2:7, 19 we learn that God formed Adam from dust (*‘āpār*) and birds and animals from the ground (*‘ādāmâ*, clay, a synonym of *‘āpār*). “Let the waters bring forth abundantly” suggests that water creatures were made from water. However, a better translation might be, “And God said let creatures with the breath of life teem in the waters.” Genesis 1 does not tell us what they were made from. In v. 21 Moses tells us God’s command was obeyed. He adds that among what he saw were the “great creatures of the sea” [NIV], the *tannîn*.<sup>33</sup> Evidently these were not whales (as in the KJV), but creatures that could live in inland lakes. (This does not mean, of course, that whales were not created at the same time elsewhere, unseen by Moses in his vision.)

God then blessed these creatures. Verse 22 says, “And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.” The text does not say God blessed them, then commanded them to be fruitful and multiply. It seems likely that even though “Be fruitful” is an imperative, it is in fact the blessing God uttered. Thus, God blessed these creatures with the gift of making more of their kind. This was not a command to be carried out in perpetuity, however onerous it might be, but a gift made possible through a blessing which was in itself miraculous, as it conferred the ability to reproduce. Similarly, when Jesus said, “Rise up and walk,” he was in fact blessing a person with the gift of healing. In his creative word was the enabling of the blessing.

When God said “Let there be light,” there was not yet light. The day began as the light appeared. Perhaps we should imagine the voice of God on the fifth day sounding just at dawn. Perhaps Moses didn’t actually see the birds appear. Perhaps the first he saw of them was when they rocketed off dark branches and soared in silhouette into the sky. Imagine the brief vision zooming in on hundreds of wonderful birds as they flew, as they landed, as they preened and strutted. Imagine middle shots of groups of birds among the trees, long shots of vast flocks in the sky. Imagine Moses carried in vision to the shore of the newly pre-

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<sup>33</sup> Maarten J. Paul writes, “From Ezek 29:3 and 32:2 many deduce that the crocodile or the hippopotamus is intended. Yet a greater and mightier sea creature is more likely” (*NIDOTTE*, 4:313–314).

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pared sea and seeing fish and other water creatures as they presented themselves. Then the scene faded with the sun, and Moses knew the fifth day of God's creation was ending.

Again at dawn in the vision, now the sixth day, Moses heard God's voice: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind." In the next verse Moses tells us God made these creatures, but he doesn't give us details of that making. It is easiest to imagine the sun rising and waking these animals, created at God's command on the sixth day but before it was light. In the vision the shot dollied or cut from animal to animal as they stretched and yawned, rose to their feet, and praised their Creator, each in its distinctive voice. He needn't have seen all of them. Perhaps he saw a representative sample. Perhaps he saw the representatives of each "kind" God created, before the variation God created in them led to the multitude of "species" we see today.

In Gen 2:19 we are told God formed these creatures out of the ground, while in 1:24 God commands specifically that the land bring them forth. We should see these as synonymous. If we do, we discover that Gen 2:19 does not necessarily tell us God formed each of these animals as a potter forms a vessel, using hands to mold the clay. Instead, they both tell us these creatures were not created out of nothing, but were made using the elements found in the ground created "in the beginning." There is, thus, a connection between land and creature. In the KJV, God says, "Let the earth bring them forth," as if the land were their mother bringing them forth as children. "Mother Earth" is a pagan conception, however, and it seems likely that as in his treatment of the "lights" on the fourth day, Moses is avoiding pagan conceptions of creation.<sup>34</sup> Instead, God uses

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<sup>34</sup> The section on the creation of mankind in the Babylonian flood story known as "Atrahasis" has similarities to Gen 1 and 2 which have led some scholars to speculate that the Genesis chapters are based on it [see Miguel Civil's translation in Lambert and Millard, *Atrahasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1969)]. There are also echoes of the ideas of the incarnation, atonement, eucharist, and baptism. The "image of god" is achieved by incorporating the flesh and blood of a god with the clay of the earth. This is done so man will have intelligence. The purpose of the creation is so mortal man can do the dirty work previously done by gods condemned to dwell on earth—they have already themselves dug the Tigris and Euphrates. This reminds one of the curse placed on Adam in Gen 3:19. Note the following lines, taken from *Myths From Mesopotamia: Gilgamesh, the Flood, and Others*, translated by Stephanie Dalley. "Belel-illi the womb goddess is present— / Let her create a mortal man / So that he may bear the yoke . . . / Let man bear the load of the gods! . . . On the first, seventh, and fifteenth of the month / I shall make a purification by washing. / Then one god should be slaughtered. / And the gods can be purified by immersion. / Nintu shall mix the clay / With his flesh and blood. / Then a god and a man / Will be mixed together in clay. / Let us hear the drumbeat forever after, / Let a ghost come into existence from the god's flesh, / Let her proclaim it as a living sign, / And let the ghost exist so as not to forget the slain god." (Available on-line at [www.piney.com/Atrahasis.html](http://www.piney.com/Atrahasis.html).) Given the frequency with which stories of the creation and the flood are found among cultures around the world, one might well argue that they are all based to some extent on ancient memories of an actual event, fuzzy or distorted as they may be. [Mary Wakeman studies the cosmic conflict idea in twelve cultures in *God's Battle with the Mon-*

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a form of the word *yāṣāʾ*, which throughout the OT is frequently used in the concept of ransom or redemption.<sup>35</sup> Perhaps we should see in this command—only metaphorically, of course—God’s liberation of life from the ground, rather as in the resurrection our bodies will be liberated from the grave. If we make something out of clay, we use our hands, but when God makes it, His words can serve as hands, as did the words of Jesus when He healed, and as will the final call to “Come forth” at the return of Christ.

In the vision, after he had reveled in the beauty of the animals, Moses again heard God’s voice: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.”

What did Moses see? If he did indeed see Gen 1 as a vision, then Gen 2 seems to be a separate vision, a close-up view of the creation of Adam and Eve.

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*ster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1973). According to Boyd (78), she finds that the similarities are as follows: “A hostile monster threatens creation; a heroic god defeats the monster and releases forces necessary for life; and the god then controls or fashions these life forces to bring about the creation of the world, or at least significantly influence life in this world.”], I would suggest that we should see “Atrahasis” not as a complete fabrication, but as an embellishment of an ancient true story passed down from Noah. Genesis 1, by contrast, if indeed based on a vision, can be seen as God’s corrective of a garbled story. One aspect of these Mesopotamian stories of the creation worth further exploration is the “God at war” theme. In places, we find sky gods and earth gods at war with each other, with man caught in the middle. This is similar to the story of the fall in Gen 3, but it may be that some of the details of the battle recall truths passed down from Noah, but not collected in Genesis. (Of course, one must be very cautious in finding veracity in such mythic accounts.) For example, in the Babylonian poem “Enuma Elish,” tablet 1, we find these lines: “And Tiamat [a goddess of chaos condemned to dwell in the abyss of the earth] harkened unto the word of the bright god, and said: . . . let us wage war! / . . . They [the earth gods she created] banded themselves together and at the side of Tiamat they advanced; / They were furious; they devised mischief without resting night and day. / They prepared for battle, fuming and raging; / They joined their forces and made war, / Ummu-Hubur [Tiamat] who formed all things, / Made in addition weapons invincible; she spawned monster-serpents, . . .” The hero-son of the greatest sky god offers to go to earth and fight Tiamat. He says, “O my father, let not the word of thy lips be overcome, / Let me go, that I may accomplish all that is in thy heart.” His father says, “The neck of Tiamat shalt thou swiftly trample under foot.” The son says, “O Lord of the gods, Destiny of the great gods, / If I, your avenger, / Conquer Tiamat and give you life, / Appoint an assembly, make my fate preeminent and proclaim it.” [Taken from the L. W. King translation, from *The Seven Tablets of Creation* (London: n.p., 1902), available on-line at [www.sacred-texts.com/ane/enuma.htm](http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/enuma.htm).] On tablet 11 of the Old Babylonian version of the flood story in the Gilgamesh Epic, the rain lasts six days and nights. On the seventh day Utnapishtim (also called Atrahasis, and synonymous with Noah) sends out a dove. Here too we find an echo of creation week, as the days of creation are substituted for the days found in the Genesis flood story. There are more interesting parallels with the cosmic conflict idea in tablets 4–6 of “Enuma Elish” [see E. A. Speiser’s translation called “The Creation Epic” in *The Ancient Near East, Volume 1: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures*, ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1958), 31–39.] See also James E. Atwell, “An Egyptian Source for Genesis 1,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, 51/2 (October 2000): 441–477.

<sup>35</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *NIDOTTE*, 2:498–500.

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In the vision of Gen 1, however, we don't find the detail we find in Gen 2. We don't see God forming man from dust. It is possible that Moses left out the details because he knew they would be in Genesis 2. It is also possible, however, that in this "movie" the details weren't seen. Perhaps he heard God's voice, then, a few minutes later, saw male and female walking together, as if God worked in private.

What is most significant is that in his vision, Moses saw clearly that the creation of man was separate from the creation of the beasts and insects. Mankind was made in God's "image," and while they were made from the same chemicals as the beasts, there was a difference. They were not fellow creatures on the same level, but separate, set apart and above.<sup>36</sup>

Again Moses heard God proclaim a blessing. There is no mention of his hearing God bless the land creatures, but only the sea and air creatures. However, as they too reproduce, we can deduce that even if Moses did not hear this blessing in his vision, the animals too were blessed. What he hears is a blessing on the male and female made in God's image. Their blessing allows them not only to reproduce but to govern all other animals.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Raymond C. Van Leeuwen (*NIDOTTE*, 3:643, in his article on "Form, Image") quotes Lichtheim's translation of the Tenth Dynasty Egyptian "Instruction Addressed to King Merikare" (ca. 2050 BC): "Well tended is mankind—god's cattle, / He made sky and earth for their sake . . . / He made breath for their noses to live. / They are his images, who came from his body . . . / He made for them plants and cattle, / Fowl and fish to feed them. . . . / When they weep he hears . . . / For god knows every name." It is worth mentioning—and this applies to all ANE texts—that translation is an imperfect art inevitably colored by the presuppositions, biases, and education of the translator. Where one translator may find on a tablet words very similar to a biblical text, the next scholar to translate that tablet may read something quite different. It is useful to compare translations wherever possible.

<sup>37</sup> Philip J. Nel points out that the cognate verb *redû* in Akkadian means to drive or guide animals, as would a shepherd, even though the Hebrew *rāḏāh* is closely tied to kingly dominance by force (*NIDOTTE*, 3:1055–1056). Perhaps we should see the rulership of Adam and Eve in the light of Jesus' words about Himself as the Good Shepherd. There is another aspect worth considering, however, even though a full study cannot be done here. Van Leeuwen writes (4:644), regarding scholarly understanding of "the image of God," "In recent research, Stendebach discerns two main lines of interpretation of the image. First, humankind is God's representative upon earth, given the task of dominion over the nonhuman creation. The second model sees humankind as God's counterpart (*Gegenüber Gottes*), so that a dialogical relation between God and humankind exists (Stendebach, 1051–52). Both models are valid, in that they express aspects of being 'in the image of God.'" Consider this, however. When David and Goliath fought, they fought as champions (1 Sam 17:4, 23). Goliath explained what that meant (v. 9): "If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us." In other words, one stood as representative for all—winner take all. This is precisely what happened when Adam yielded to temptation. Paul tells us, in Rom 5:15, "For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many!" (See also Rom 5:16, 19; 1 Cor 15:22.) By this understanding, the image of God in Adam may have been less Adam as vicar of God representing God to the rest of the creation than God's designation of Adam as His champion in the fight against the serpent, Satan (Rev 12:9; 20:2). Adam, of course, lost that battle and so delivered his dominion into



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We have tended to imagine, in our reading of Gen 1 and 2, God speaking the animals into existence, but molding man from dust with His own hands, kneeling beside him, and breathing life into him. However, the word for how God “formed” man from dust in 2:7 is the same word found in 2:19 explaining how God “formed” the animals. We might argue that 2:7 mentions God breathing into man’s nostrils, while there is no mention of this intimate act in the forming of animals in 2:19, so there was actual physical contact. However, this breathing may also be metaphorical, an anthropomorphism, just as the forming from dust is a much simplified symbol for the inconceivably complex work God performed with such apparent ease.

#### **The Function of Prophetic Symbols**

This leads to a difficult question. Certainly the fact that there is no description of the process of making man in Genesis 1 doesn’t necessarily mean Moses didn’t see that process at the time. It may have happened in the distance, without him being able to see the details. He may have seen the details and left them out. On the other hand, if Moses didn’t see the details in the first vision but did in the second, this suggests that what he saw in either vision or both may have been, to a certain extent, symbolic, as is so often the case in Revelation. (For example, Christ’s appearance as a slain lamb in Rev. 5 does not mean He actually looks like a lamb today. Likewise, the plagues of Rev. 16 need not be literally poured out of literal bowls, even though that’s what happened in the vision.)

It is possible that creation occurring as a result of God’s spoken word may be a symbolic way of revealing God’s creative power and claiming Him as the author of it all. It’s possible, for example, that in fact God spoke each kind of plant or animal individually into existence, or formed each from dust, even though it didn’t appear in the vision. It may be that the forming of Adam from dust and God’s breath was indeed what Moses saw in the second vision, but was meant to symbolize God’s making of mankind from chemical compounds, rather than by man’s suddenly appearing *ex nihilo*. Likewise, the use of Adam’s rib in making woman may have been a symbolic depiction revealing the relationship between male and female, rather than the actual way it was done.<sup>38</sup> That’s how visions work.

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slavery to Satan, but God arranged a rematch, this time not with his created “counterpart,” but with His Son, incarnated, as the Champion. Salvation by Champion is not as thoroughly attested an analogy for what Christ accomplished on the cross as is ransom/redemption or forensic justification, but it is nonetheless there and true.

<sup>38</sup> The sharing of a rib, the part closest to the heart, symbolizes a unity of mental and physical rank or stature, with the exception that Adam is God’s champion and Eve is not. (This is why, when God seeks out Adam and Eve after the fall, He first specifically addresses Adam, not Eve. This is not an indication of a pre-fall headship, as some have argued, but of Adam’s role as God’s champion, which is entirely irrespective of gender and cannot be passed on to his descendants, as it is a role assigned to a single individual by God. As Adam was the champion, and had by his fall cost God the battle, it was appropriate that God address him first.)

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The possibly symbolic purpose of certain aspects of the vision, of course, does not mean that everything was symbolic, and even symbols have specific referents. It seems very clear from the text that God was communicating creation by days, not by aeons, and that God proceeded systematically and logically, not by way of some promiscuous evolution from primeval slime.

Did Moses see God in this vision? Certainly he heard God. One might argue that he knew man was made in God's likeness because he could see God and see the resemblance between God and His children. Many scholars have argued that the "image of God" mentioned here was not physical appearance but something else.<sup>39</sup> It is possible that throughout this entire vision Moses stood beside God and watched Him at work. But if he did, he didn't say so.

It is clear, in any case, that Moses heard and reported the words God wanted him to hear. Whether or not they were the exact words God spoke at the time of creation doesn't really matter. They were the words God wanted to communicate to us to reveal what He wanted us to know about His mighty acts. In the light of the way words are given in Revelation, we may well err if we assume these were the only words spoken in that week. We might also consider whether in that week God spoke in a language Moses could understand, or whether those words were translated for Moses in his vision. As Job discovered, our duty is not to know God in His entirety but to accept Him as He reveals Himself.

Then God gave further instructions: "Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat." Is this all God would have said to Adam and Eve on that day? Surely not. But it seems to be all God said to them in that vision. Again, it would not have been at all difficult for them to know which trees and herbs they could eat from, if we are right in understanding the text to say that the only vegetation Moses saw was either the grass meant for the animals or the trees and herbs that bore food for mankind.

Once more, Moses realized God was pleased with what He had made, though whether or not He said so is not clear. The sun went down, the sixth day was ending, and God had finished making "the heavens and the earth . . . and all the host of them." This last sentence, the first verse of chap. 2, seems like a summary. In cinematic terms, we might see it as the vision's credits: "Produced by God; Directed by God; Filmed on Location." However, Sailhamer prefers to see Gen 2:4 as the summary/title of Gen 1 and perhaps also Gen 2.<sup>40</sup> I prefer to

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<sup>39</sup> See Van Leeuwen, 4:644, for a summary of scholarly approaches to this question in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>40</sup> *Genesis Unbound*, 102–103.

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see Gen 2:1 as a summary of God's work serving to separate the first six days from the seventh.

#### **The Separated Day**

The vision wasn't over. There are two more verses, and there was one more day. A technique frequently found in movies is showing scenes of celebration or bonding of relationship during the credits. Perhaps we should see the seventh day in this light—a happy ending.

However, chapter divisions weren't made until the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and verse divisions weren't made until the 16<sup>th</sup> century. I would suggest that v. 1 and the first clause of v. 2 should be seen as one sentence, as follows: "Thus the heavens and earth were finished, and all the host of them, and on the seventh day God rested."

What follows in vs. 2 and 3 is an example of that wonderful Hebrew rhetorical form called a chiasm, or reverse parallelism, in which the most important idea is sandwiched between one or more sets of parallel phrases or passages. Note the similarities between the end of v. 2, "and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made," and the end of v. 3, "because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." These nearly identical phrases alert us to the possible presence of a chiasm. What is the central idea at the heart of this chiasm? "And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it." The phrase "seventh day" and its pronoun "it" are repeated at the center of the chiasm, tying together the three parts.

A and **he rested** on the SEVENTH DAY **from all his work** which he had made,

B and God blessed the SEVENTH DAY, and sanctified IT,

A' because that in IT **he had rested from all his work** which God created and made.

The seventh day is the only day without the "evening and morning" formula, as if in it is no darkness at all. It is the only day named three times, as if to make completely clear for all eternity that it is the *seventh* day and no other. (Likewise, the Sabbath commandment begins with the word "Remember.") It is the only day God blessed. "Sanctified" means essentially "set apart," especially for holy purposes. Again this is unique among the week's days.

But what did the vision look like? How did the vision communicate the idea of God resting? Did it show God lying on the grass with His head leaning on one elbow? Did it show God walking through the garden with Adam and Eve? Did Moses deduce God's rest from the absence of creative activity without seeing Him? Did Moses see God in his vision but choose not to describe Him? Perhaps. These verses are also unusual in that only in the description of the seventh day is God not quoted. Moses says God blessed the day and set it apart. Blessings are

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conveyed by words, so probably Moses heard God speak in his vision, but we are not given the exact words.

Perhaps as the light came up on the seventh day, Moses heard God call out His blessing on this day of rest. Then, in the last minutes of the vision, God showed him scenes of this new land, complete and perfect and at rest. Earlier in the week the vision had focused on parts of creation. Perhaps on this day he saw those parts interacting smoothly and beautifully.

### **Conclusion**

We have no sure way of knowing, of course, if Moses saw Gen. 1 as a vision or received it orally or in writing. If he received it orally or in writing, we might wonder about the source or the accuracy of transmission. If he received it in a vision from God, we can be sure of its inspiration, sure that what Moses saw was what God wanted him to see. That does not mean what he saw was a real-time depiction of what happened, nor that God carefully explained everything Moses saw. The vision format allows for the possibility of certain aspects being symbolic, for that is often the case in biblical visions. (We see, for example, the appearance of land, but not the physical process by which the land responded to the call for it to come forth.) However, this is the picture of creation accepted as trustworthy fact by the rest of the authors of the Bible and by Jesus. If we accept the Bible's inspiration, then we must accept that this is what God wants us to believe about creation.<sup>41</sup> If there are complexities not mentioned—and certainly there are—they do not affect our salvation. On the other hand, a failure to accept this vision as a revelation of truth leads naturally to doubting the word of any Bible author who accepted it as true and based doctrine on it.<sup>42</sup>

Imagining Gen. 1 as cinema helps us glimpse the original form of the vision. It is clearly not a picture of gradual and accidental evolution, not an action movie about the defeat of the chaos monster, but a carefully edited revelation of nature obeying its Master's command. Despite its possible symbolic elements, it is clearly meant to be seen as a period of days, not ages. Recalling the techniques of cinema and of visions, we can understand why there are so few words, so few scenes, for we know that through clever editing the part may suggest the whole. Moses was given enough information for him to understand and retell the

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<sup>41</sup> One might argue that the "evening and morning" formula found six times in Gen 1 was Moses' misunderstanding of the cinematic fade to black technique between scenes, as God Himself does not call these scenes days. However, it is difficult to argue that Moses did not see these as literal days. If he was mistaken, then surely the God who spoke to him "face to face" could have corrected him on such an important point. One might also suggest that the making of animal life from dust symbolized a lengthy process of evolution from some primeval ooze, with fish and reptiles, animals, and mankind following separate tracks, but this would be reading a modern cosmology into the story in an unacceptable way. There is certainly no sign that biblical authors understood it that way.

<sup>42</sup> See my "Creation and a Logical Faith," *Dialogue* 10/1:28–29, for examples of doctrines tied together with creation by biblical authors.

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story, but not so much that he would forget part of it or leave out important aspects.

Would this vision, transferred to the screen, win an Oscar? Perhaps not. That isn't the purpose of visions. But someday, when I get to heaven, I want to rent the video.

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